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FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9125
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000182

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/SCE, EUR/PPD, EUR/RPM AND EUR/ERA
OSD FOR POPOVICH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT - APRIL 3, 2009

11. CROATIAN LEADERS HAIL HISTORIC ACCOMPLISHMENT OF BECOMING
A MEMBER OF NATO:

Prime Minister Sanader told the press on April 1 that by becoming a member of NATO, Croatia achieved a goal that it had been trying to achieve for nearly two decades. Sanader stated that a special debt of gratitude for this accomplishment was owed to the veterans who fought to defend Croatia during the 90s. President Mesic said that by becoming a member of NATO Croatia had achieved the first of its two main foreign policy goals, the second being to join the EU. Mesic went on to say that with entry into NATO Croatia had ensured its security. He also stressed that the Alliance protected democratic values, and noted that Croatia becoming a member of NATO confirmed that the country has adopted and defends high-democratic standards. Both leaders also congratulated Albania for becoming a member of the Alliance. (D,Amico)

12. (U) JUSTICE SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR OFFERS STRAIGHT TALK TO
CROATIAN AUDIENCES:

Over a two-day visit organized as part of IIP's Strategic Speaker Initiative, Justice O'Connor impressed her audiences with her frank and open discussions under the overarching theme of judicial independence. In her talk to over 150 students and faculty at the Zagreb Law Faculty, Justice O'Connor told them that Supreme Court Justices may be appointed by one President but serve long after his term and are not bound by the 'President's views. She shared her own story of making her legal career as a woman in the 1950's and of being appointed to the Supreme Court. Questions covered the electoral college, the death penalty, the role of foreign legal decisions and property rights. The Dean hosted a lunch for Justice O'Connor, the Ambassador and eight junior faculty members who studied or received their degrees in the U.S. In the afternoon, Justice O'Connor spoke about judicial independence to Croatian judges at the Zagreb County Court, and to judges from Split and Rijeka via digital video conferencing equipment that the Embassy had donated. Her talk was right on target, emphasizing current themes of debate in Croatia such as the procedures for impeachment, financing of the courts, and financial disclosure requirements. Justice O'Connor met separately with the Presidents of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts and the Minister of Justice and with top judicial officials at a dinner hosted by the Ambassador. The discussions focused on judicial reform in Croatia, including resolving outstanding war crimes issues, combating organized crime and corruption, giving the Constitutional and Supreme Courts discretion to hear cases, and methods for appointing and promoting judges. During a lunch hosted by the DCM for Croatia's premier NGO leaders, Justice O'Connor received a candid briefing on ongoing corruption and human rights issues. In all cases, Croatian officials enthusiastically solicited Justice O'Connor's assessment of their reform efforts and, for her part, the Justice said she was impressed by the progress

being made in Croatia. Croatia's leading daily newspaper interviewed Justice O'Connor and expects to publish the article in their weekend edition. Her visit will provide a platform from which we can develop future programs to support Croatian efforts in judicial reform. Coming on the same day as Croatia became a full NATO member, this was a banner day for the Embassy and U.S.-Croatian relations. (RPost)

13. (U) TRANSNATIONAL STING OPERATION NETS 40 SUSPECTED HUMAN SMUGGLERS:

On Wednesday the Office to Combat Corruption and Organized Crime (USKOK), in cooperation with 11 police precincts throughout Croatia, arrested 40 people suspected of engaging in people smuggling. "Operation Tara" was organized in cooperation with Austria, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and is the culmination of an investigation that began late last year. Most suspects were from areas close to Croatia's borders with Austria, Slovenia and Hungary, and a large number came from the Roma community. The suspects will be charged with at least 150 cases of human smuggling. (JNCallahan)

14. (U) OFFICIAL DATA CONFIRM GDP SLOWDOWN FOR 2008, WHILE IMPORTS AND EXPORTS CONTINUE TO FALL IN 2009:

Data released by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics on March 29 show 2.4 percent growth in GDP for 2008, well below earlier projections of 4.5 percent growth. Initial calculations indicate 2008 GDP totaled HRK 342.1 billion (\$62.2 billion) at current prices. Fourth quarter growth fell to 0.2 percent year-on-year, marking the slowest quarterly growth since 2000. Both imports and exports showed negative growth in the fourth quarter. This trend has continued into 2009, with exports down 3.8 percent and imports down nearly

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24 percent year-on-year in February. The steeper decline of imports shrank the trade deficit about 40 percent to HRK 7.5 billion (\$1.4 billion) for January-February 2009, while raising the export-import ratio to 54.8 percent. (SLitke)

15. (U) LOCAL ELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT NEXT WEEK:

Local media are reporting that the Croatian Government will deliberate the timing of the formal announcement for local elections next week, and the official start of the campaign season will likely be set for April 15. The local election law stipulates that local elections will be held on the third Sunday in May--this year May 17--and the government can announce the formal campaign period to begin between 30 and 60 days before the actual election date. (DMEGES)
BRADTKE